

SCRANTON TRIBUNE

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THE SCRANTON TRIBUNE.

SCRANTON, MARCH 31, 1894.

TWO DEATHS and several inflictions of painful injury within two years form a sufficiently serious local record against the sharp-pointed picket fence to fully justify its abolition by councilmanic enactment.

Keep an Eye on Councils.

In the interesting letter with which President Chittenden of select council recently favored a morning contemporary it was virtually charged to the discredit of the local press that through its lukewarmness or indifference, some months ago, the city of Scranton was robbed of \$100,000 in valuable public franchises. Without assuming either to dissent or to contradict this charge, which belongs to an episode now beyond recall—an episode, too, in which, if the press was derelict, the city council, whose immediate duty and business was, then, as it is, now, to protect the public welfare, whether aided or ignored by the newspapers—THE TRIBUNE, in view of next week's councilmanic reorganization, desires to volunteer a suggestion.

It desires to suggest that those citizens who feel dissatisfied with the recent work of councils, and who, like Mr. Chittenden, appear to place the burden of their blame rather upon the newspapers than upon the councilmen individually responsible, hereafter take the pains to keep more closely in touch with the progress of local legislation. From the very nature of things, it is vain to expect the local press to do everything in this direction. While it may not heretofore have done as much as it could or should have done, it has been, is, and will be powerless to do anything unless loyally supported by an intelligent public sentiment that is not only willing to make searching individual inquiry into the details of municipal legislation, but also willing to reward faithful and punish unfaithful servants at the polls. Nor can we, in this connection, wholly acquit those members of councils who, when aware of legislative abuses and conversant with inner details of alleged jobbery and corruption, do not take the trouble to share their knowledge with the public until too late to be of practical avail.

But, letting this phase of the matter pass, what of the future? Beginning next Monday evening a new body of legislators will have charge of our municipal destiny. We cannot now undo the mistakes that belong to history. We can, though, have a share in the making of future history, and this is a good time for all classes and conditions of citizens to decide upon a more careful scrutiny of the doings of their official servants. There should be at all sessions of common and select council be a liberal representation of taxpayers. It is not enough to elect men to do a certain work and then neglect them which they are doing it. Such a policy leads inevitably to elusiveness and faulty workmanship, if not to greater evils. It will be THE TRIBUNE's endeavor hereafter to give redoubled attention to the proceedings of our municipal government; but it can offer no claims to omniscience and it can be of service to the public only in so far that it can be accurate and impartial in its reports and comments. It cannot play the detective. It cannot assume the functions of a spy.

Will Mr. Chittenden and other honorable and fair minded members of councils agree to help it to correct information? Will they extend to the public through the press, in time to be of use to the public, such exclusive knowledge of jobbery and wrong as may come to them by virtue of their official trust?

AN AGREEABLE tribute was deservedly conferred by Scranton Elks the other evening when they chose as their exalted ruler for the ensuing year versatile, elegant and companionable Colonel F. J. Fitzsimmons. In view of the fact that this tenure of office will be the first under the occupancy of the Elks' new home, the selection of Colonel Fitzsimmons was in truth the highest compliment that could be paid him by 350 of the foremost men in Scranton. It was a fitting recognition of his industrious labors in behalf of the lodge, as well as a high personal tribute to a gentleman whose philosophy, eloquence, wit and humor rank high among Scranton's intellectual endowments.

An Important Office.

The experience of Luzerne county with the new law creating in certain counties the office of county controller already shows a material saving to the public. It is estimated, we believe, that the new office, including its \$2,500 salary, clerk hire, stationery and incidentals, will cost something like \$5,000 a year. More than that amount has been saved to the Luzerne county treasury in the first month of Controller Reese's term. For January, 1893, the county's expenses were \$11,000. For January, 1894, they were \$5,000, and the falling off was due, not to a decrease in the necessary business of county administration, but to a vigorous and impartial blue-pencilling of illegal and exorbitant charges, and to a general overhauling of the county finances. For February the saving is not nearly so great, partly because of extra litigation waged against the county by victims of the controller's economical snicker-snack during the preceding month, and partly because many abuses which had existed in January and got properly dressed down, did not dare show their heads again.

But it is clearly evident from the general howl which has gone up from the old ringsters in Luzerne that the controllership experiment is progressing satisfactorily to the people. It was not to be expected that the cutting off of illegal revenues and the scaling of

bills payable down to their normal dimensions of fairness and honesty could proceed without the incitement of a lusty clamor. A county which has been so long and so systematically misgoverned in certain directions as has Luzerne can be restored to health only through surgical excisions, amputations and lancing that will draw blood and elicit outcry. It is even possible that the knife will sometimes attack a healthy part and thus do a temporary injustice. The merits of the controllership, however, deserve to be computed in the aggregate, if they then outweigh the inevitable mistakes, the wisdom of the law will have been fully vindicated.

Enough has been made manifest with reference to the new law to demonstrate the supreme need of choosing honest, experienced and courageous men to the office of controller. A county controller under the terms of the present law possesses nearly the same preponderant importance in the government of a county that is possessed in a city government by the mayor or in a borough government by the burgess. He does not possess their appointive powers. But he is nevertheless by all odds the most influential executive official in the county government, and if he be the right man in the right place, he can earn his salary ten times over. The salary, by the way, is relatively too small. It should be at least as much as the salary paid a president judge, and could well be doubled if thereby the quality of the occupant could be doubled also.

The controllership is an innovation in county government which has great possibilities.

IS THE coincidence prophetic that Scranton's new councils are to organize the day after All Fools' day?

COUNCILS HAVE acted none too hastily in pushing forward, with the utmost possible expedition, Mr. Davies' ordinance for the erection of the proposed West Lackawanna viaduct. Every day of delay at this much traveled portion of Scranton's main business avenue is a day of real danger. At any moment human life may be sacrificed or non-fatal accident result in permanent injury. The danger will be practically removed by the construction of this viaduct, the money for the viaduct is already in sight and all that is now necessary is one final vote in select council, executive approval and the beginning of real business. Fortunately these preliminaries will soon be attended to.

A Yankee in Gray.

The literature of the great rebellion will never come to an end. The annals of the most momentous war in the history of civilization, whether conveyed in prosy chronicle or cleverly interwoven into fascinating fiction, will never lack interest. The spirit of that memorable conflict, its heroic struggles, trials, pains and sacrifices, will live in human recollection so long as patriotism is a vital sentiment and gratitude a human faculty.

In "A Yankee in Gray," the opening chapters of which are printed in this issue of THE TRIBUNE, one of the survivors of this crucial struggle for American freedom has constructed a narrative that has all the accuracy of fact blended with all the pleasing imagery and sentiment of romance. It is in a large sense a prose epic, penned by the masterly hand of Charles E. Lewis, whose writings under the pseudonym of "M. Quad" are familiar in every household.

This romance has been selected for serial publication in this paper because it is clean in tone, wholesome in atmosphere and instinct with a genuine love for American institutions. It is a story which the young should read for instruction, and which the old will relish for the stirring reminiscences that it will call to mind. Do not miss the opening chapters; for once snapped the thread of interest will with difficulty be regained.

Remember Martin Lavelle.

While there is no thought of doing otherwise, it may not be amiss to tell Scranton's new councilmen that they will be expected to re-elect City Clerk Martin Lavelle by acclamation. This expectation is founded on years of faithful, diligent and conscientious service which have made Mr. Lavelle as much a part of the city of Scranton as the city hall is a part of it. It is founded on a familiarity with municipal affairs which, if one man can ever be truly said to be indispensable, points to Mr. Lavelle as that man. It is founded upon a modesty which has never obtruded itself, upon a conscientious application to duty which has never shirked any labor calculated to promote the city's interests, and upon a quiet strength of personal manliness which has made Mr. Lavelle every body's friend. We just simply couldn't spare him from the city clerkship, and that's all there is about it.

But the duty of the incoming council will not end with the mere re-election of an official that they would have to re-elect anyhow. The measure of the city's obligations to Mr. Lavelle is broader and deeper than this. Time without number, almost, when he has

been solicited to accept a larger compensation for his increasing valuable services he has refused point blank, upon the plea that the city cannot afford to expend more than it is now expending upon the city clerkship. This kind of refusal from some men would be construed as a bid for cheap applause and as a hint for more coaxing; but in the case of Mr. Lavelle it is absolutely without any sinister significance. It is nothing more nor less than that natural outcropping of the rugged honesty of a man who puts heart and conscience into his work, who is above cheap trick or artifice and who feels sincerely, although, as we think, mistakenly, that he is receiving all that his services are worth.

AS SHE Observes It.

I heard a man remark the other day what a special part of Providence Arthur Frothingham must be, if we are to believe the statement that the Lord loveth whom He chasteneth. It did sound a trifle sacrilegious, yet somehow we couldn't object much to the statement, for the speaker wasn't in the least flippant about the matter, but seemed to feel an intense anxiety to have it understood that Arthur hadn't been given a fair show in this theater business. How was the proprietor of the new theater to know that the blizzard and general freezing up of the land which was prophesied by the prophets to strike us from the seventh to the twelfth of March, would fool along until the date fixed for the opening of the new house and then come down cold enough to freeze the hair on a dog's (though why that comparison is usually made the matter, but seemed to feel an intense anxiety to have it understood that Arthur hadn't been given a fair show in this theater business. 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